



Friday, July 29, 2005

# Weekly wrap up

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## Betsy Dunn Goes to D.C.

The oft-quoted DCS caseworker who has watched first-hand as methamphetamine has overtaken the lives of many of the Upper Cumberland's most vulnerable children was invited Tuesday to testify before a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee.

Dunn told the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources that "methamphetamine takes over a family's life and threatens to destroy everything – especially the children who have the misfortune of living beneath the same roof as their drug-addicted parents."

She sat on a panel with law-enforcement and child-welfare colleagues from around the nation. All reported on being overwhelmed by the meth epidemic in their home states and counties.

She delivered her 5-minute oral testimony with great poise and heart-felt emotion, then fielded questions with the aplomb of Willie Mays.

For the time being, you can catch her, [here](#), on C-SPAN's website.

(Or, go to [c-span.org](http://c-span.org) and search the recent programs for "Fighting Methamphetamine in America's Heartland.")

U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper's introduction of Betsy is at about 00:13:20 into the broadcast. Betsy starts at about 2:15:00.

Watch it on a computer that supports Real Player, then give Betsy a pat on the back.

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## The Latest on Brian A.

*Commissioner: Lots of Promise  
But Still a Long Way to Go*

Thursday we met all day with the technical advisory committee and the Brian A plaintiff's attorneys. They clearly are, in many ways, well satisfied with the change initiative occurring in Tennessee. They are even suggesting that we may be a national model of public child welfare reform.

Make no mistake: They realize, as to we, that we still have a very long way to go.

Their primary are of concern is the lack of stability in our out of home placements. We are far below both National Standards and Brian A requirements in this are.

We cannot fix the past. We can only fix this issue going forward. We have many initiatives in place that should dramatically improve our practice in placement stability:

1. CFTM use in determining first placement best placement and in preventing placement disruption.
2. Increasing our use of high quality placement with relative and kinship providers.
3. Dramatically increasing, in partnership with our private providers, the number and quality of our foster home network.
4. Continued focus on our Implementation Plans.
5. Careful attention to necessary support services for our children and families during out of home placement.

Each of you has data in your implementation plan on children entering care from Jan.1 of this year and their number of different placements. This group of children can be assured a much higher level of placement stability if we focus on best practices in our work with them and their families.

Please let us know if you have developed any other strategies particularly focusing on placement stability that could be helpful to others. We proved the power of working together on CPS backlog. We will only solve the placement stability issue by once again working together in the best interest of our children and families.

**Viola P. Miller**

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## **CSAs and Community Interaction**

We are now one month into our CSA transition schedule, about to complete transitioning Group I (Davidson, Hamilton, Knox) and moving forward towards transitioning Group II (So. Central, UC, NW) on Sept. 1. The CSA transition is bringing many opportunities and strengths into DCS.

One of these opportunities is to make the most of our new employees' ability to utilize community networks. They have an active presence on community boards and work groups within their various regions. This will provide a great avenue for DCS to work with our community partners to ensure families and children are getting the best care possible.

As this integration occurs, it can be easy to stay in our own world and expect others to join in without taking the time to see the strengths being added. However, if we want to be a professional child welfare agency, it is extremely important that everyone in DCS continually learn from each other's expertise and how it integrates into our specific duties.

While we do believe that DCS has made progress in the area of community partnering over the past year, largely due to the Family-to-Family initiative and the Commissioner's insistence on regional community forums, we still have much room for improvement. Building relationships with our community partners will help us to reverse the "mission creep" that has infected our agency and slowed us down from the very important work we have to do.

For example, we can do a much more effective job of resource linkage if we are at the table and building positive relationships with our community partners. The CSA employees have done this well and we do not want to lose the important ground they have gained in this area just because of the transition to DCS.

In conclusion, we would encourage everyone at DCS to take note of the important strengths being brought to our agency by the CSA employees, and to take action to preserve them and foster them into something even bigger. By virtue of the fact that this transition to DCS is indeed taking place, we now have an automatic presence on many of the local boards and work groups in our communities. Now that we are there, let's not lose our place at the table.

**Tom Riss, Executive Assistant, and Debbie Waddell, Director of Prevention**

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## **Do 2 Things for Mr. Mix**

This morning we are celebrating a major accomplishment. We have reduced our percent of overdue CPS investigations well below 20percent of our caseloads. In less than three short weeks, you have reduced these investigations by over 700.

This effort took the pooling of our resources. It took commitment from all layers of our staff. It took teamwork.

This is an example of how, through teamwork, there is no goal that we cannot accomplish. I am so very proud of each and every one of you who participated

in and supported this initiative. On behalf of kids, families and our CPS staff, we say thank you.

I ask that each of you do two things today:

#1-Find a CPS case manager, Team Leader or Team Coordinator and tell them how very proud you are of them for their accomplishment.

#2-Find one non-CPS staff person who participated in the clean-up and thank them for their teamwork.

**Frank Mix**

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## **Fat Tuesday**

*In July, no less*

The Northeast Region's Foster Parent Support and Recruitment Team participated in several events at the weeklong Fun Fest 2005 festivities in Kingsport, Tennessee. We had a face painting and recruitment booth set up at Mardi Gras on Friday July 15th, which was the official Fun Fest kick-off event.

We then participated in our very first parade later that night! Some volunteers rode on the float while others walked along beside handing out candy, recruitment brochures and fans (which were welcomed and appreciated).

On July 18th, 19th and 20th, we were able to set up a "Make A Bracelet" and recruitment booth at the Kids Central event. Over 500 children stopped by our booth to make a bracelet. Thank you to the volunteers who made our recruitment involvement with Fun Fest 2005 a HUGE success! We're looking forward to next year!!

**Vanessa Addington**

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## **New Practice for Best Practices**

Daryl Chanthusus will be now offering Best Practices summaries on the department's web page. Follow these links. Read them. Learn from them:

### **N Peer Review Process & Chartered TC/Legal CQI Team**

The Upper Cumberland Region's management team truly understands that they must engage each other and their workers in weekly conversations about case practice if they are going to succeed in improving child and family outcomes in Upper Cumberland. To prove it, the region has implemented a phased peer review process that begins in phase 1 with the review of three backlog files per

cluster (1 child in residential the longest, 1 child in foster home the longest, and 1 child with sole goal of adoption or sole goal of reunification the longest) . . .

### **Best Practice –Upper Cumberland Region**

#### **Level 1 Cross-functional CQI Team**

Wally Fowler, a Southeast Region Case Manager, is an amazing champion of CQI in his region. Ahead of most regional management teams, Wally and his Level 1 CQI team have created their own cross-functional CQI team and have experienced incredible results! How did they do it? Wally tells the story best.

### **Best Practices – Southeast Region**

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## **Southeast Highlights**

If there's one thing we can all depend on, it's change. Change brings challenge and opportunity for growth. In other words, change is good. It is not easy, but it is necessary in order to move forward in providing the best services possible for the children and families that we serve. Every employee must be committed to change in order for us to be successful.

The Southeast Region has involved every employee in the process of moving forward with our implementation plan. We have also involved foster parents, stakeholders, and post custody youth. Below are some of the highlights of the progress that we have made.

- Purpose#1: Reduce the number of children entering custody by 5percent. The cohort year 2004 showed that we had 370 children entering out-of home care. The first quarter of the cohort year 2005, we had 78 children entering care. That would exceed our goal of 5 percent if we keep up this progress.
- Purpose #2: Increase the proportion of children initially placed in their home county. Our goal is to increase by 5percent the number of children initially placed in their home county. The cohort year 2004 showed we had 52 percent of our children initially placed in their home county and the first quarter of the cohort year 2005 shows of 6 percent increase placed in their home county.

- Purpose #3: Increase the proportion of children initially placed in a family setting. For calendar year 2004, 90 percent of the children who entered out-of-home care in the Southeast region experienced a first placement in a family setting. We set our goal to improve by 5 percent. The first quarter indicates that we have placed 92.3 percent of the children initially in a family setting.
- Purpose #4: Decrease the length of stay for children in out-of-home care. For calendar year 2004, the median length of stay for children in out-of-home care was 203 days. Our goal is to decrease the median length of stay by 5 percent. Progress on the median days can not be measured this early in the year. We have, however decreased the percent remaining in care after 90 days from 26 percent to 25 percent. We will have to work hard at decreasing the length of stay.
- Purpose #5: Increase the number and percent of children exiting out of home care to permanency. Southeast's current level of performance indicates that 63 percent of all children in out-of-home care on January 1, 2005 will exit to a permanent home by December 31, 2006. Our goal is to increase to 69percent. The first quarter indicates that if we continue at the same rate, we will only be at 68 percent so we will need to step up our efforts.
- Purpose #6: Decrease the number and percent of children re-entering out-of-home care. Our baseline re-entry rate is 13 percent and our upper boundary re-entry rate is 15 percent. We did have some questions about whether the re-entry rate would be measured just by those from Southeast who re-enter in Southeast or whether it also includes any child coming into custody in Southeast who may have previously been in custody anywhere in the state or whether it also includes those who have been in custody in another state. We are waiting on a response re: this question.
- Purpose #7: Increase placement stability for children in out-of-home care. For calendar year 2004, 79 percent of the children in Southeast experienced two or fewer placement moves. Our goal is to increase by 5 percent those experiencing two or few placement. The first quarter entry cohort indicates that we are at 92%.
- Purpose #8: and Purpose #9 do not currently have data available.

Some of the challenges we have faced is the amount of data which we receive and how to interpret it. Understanding the difference between point in time and cohort data was a learning experience. Also understanding that we must look at all the data concurrently and not as stand alone data.

We also felt like we were having numerous meetings --implementation plan meetings, CQI, cross-functional. We found that many of these

meetings were working on the same projects and it was taking up a lot of staff time. We have decided to combine the CQI and implementation team meetings as well as combining our regional implementation and cross-functional team.

We had our kick-off for our regional implementation and cross-functional team on July 20. Commissioner Miller attended as our Commissioner and as the technical assistant liaison for our region. This went very well. We are currently working on recruitment of homes in Bradley County. We are holding a Heart Gallery to recruit foster and adoptive homes in Cleveland on August 15 with contract agencies participating in recruitment jointly with DCS.

One of our major and most time consuming achievements was reducing our CPS backlog and being able to keep the backlog below 20 percent. Our goal is to keep the backlog below 10 percent but we are not there yet.

Although improvement on the implementation plan has been difficult and challenging, it has given us an opportunity to know our baseline and have data that indicates our progress. Our action steps give us a roadmap of how to achieve our goals. Data has been very critical in helping us look at where we began and where we are on the road to improvement.

**Sandra Holder**

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From Lawrenceburg, **Frances Hudgens** was inspired enough to share the following:

**"As we become more aware of the power that walks with us everyday, we can begin to approach life from a position of influence rather than reaction."**